Nuclear energy is still a good option

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Body

If you live in Waterloo Region, the $130-million deal that a Cambridge company signed this week to help refurbish the Bruce Nuclear Generating Station is tremendous news.

It means skilled, secure and high-paying manufacturing jobs for at least 15 years at BWXT Canada Ltd. - formerly known as Babcock & Wilcox. And it means a sustained economic boost to Cambridge and the entire region.

But everyone who lives in Ontario can applaud the deal BWXT made with Bruce Power, too. Not only does it mean the province can depend on a reliable source of energy in the coming decades - the project will extend the life of the nuclear station to 2064 - this deal will be a powerful weapon in the battle against climate change and global warming.

We know fears and suspicions persist when it comes to nuclear energy. We know many environmentalists would like the province to pull the plug on its nuclear plants.

Yet nuclear power has served Ontarians safely and effectively for nearly 50 years, ever since the Douglas Point reactor began feeding power into the grid in the late 1960s. It is by far the greatest source of electrical power in this province today, according to Ontario Power Generation.

As of noon Thursday, nuclear power was providing 56.8 per cent of the electricity being generated in Ontario - enough to meet the needs of 8.1 million homes.

In comparison, hydro power created 17.4 per cent of the electricity, enough for 2.4 million homes, while natural gas generated 15.8 per cent of the electricity, enough for 2.2 million homes.

As for wind power, it produced a respectable 8.9 per cent of the electricity being generated, enough for 1.2 million homes. Yet although wind has become a bigger player in the energy supply in recent years, it is nowhere close to matching the ability of nuclear power to meet provincial needs.

Meanwhile, solar panels, harnessing the sun's energy, didn't even account for a half of a per cent of the energy being generated, only enough to meet the needs of 58,000 homes.

These numbers tell an important story, especially for everyone who supports the initiatives by the Ontario and Canadian governments to reduce the carbon emissions that are altering the planet's climate in destructive and frightening ways.

Ontario is spending billions of dollars to subsidize solar and wind electrical generation because of their environmental benefits, even though these overly generous subsidies drove up the cost of electricity far higher than it needed to be.

Nuclear energy is still a good option

While nuclear power is expensive, many studies have concluded it is more cost effective than wind power and far more economical than solar. It offers a more dependable supply of electricity than these alternatives, too. After all, those solar panels work only when the sun shines, and those big turbines turn only when the wind blows. But the nuclear generators keep on working night or day and whatever the weather brings. And nuclear power is clean. It produces no carbon emissions. It contributes nothing to climate change. It is green.

Nuclear's critics will likely chime in here with the observation that we have still not found a way to store the radioactive waste produced by this form of power generation. They're right, and a solution to this challenge must be found.

But solutions exist. It will take decades for Ontario and Canada to reduce its carbon imprint. It will take decades to end our reliance on oil and gasoline, which are major drivers of climate change. And it will take decades for humanity to replace fossil fuels as energy sources with renewables, such as wind, solar, water power and geothermal.

As we make this generational shift, the most important green energy source will be nuclear energy. It's good to see the Ontario government's commitment to nuclear. It's heartening to know the vital role local workers at Cambridge's BWXT Canada will play in keeping this power coming.

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